

significance for further statements made, where Yeshua the Messiah is seen to possess this title as well (Revelation 22:13).

Yeshua the Messiah is not declared to be the Alef and the Tav or the Alpha and Omega at the beginning of the Book of Revelation—but He is declared to be so further on. God the Father is first declared to be the Alef and the Tav or the Alpha and Omega, with these honors further applied to Yeshua the Son. Osborne details, “Of the three uses of this title in Revelation, two refer to God (1:8; 21:6) and one to Christ (22:13; though see 1:17 where Jesus is ‘the first and the last’). From the start the unity of the Father and Son is stressed. Here God is ‘the Alpha and the Omega’ and Jesus is ‘the first and the last’ (1:17). In 21:6 God is ‘Alpha and Omega,’ and in 22:13 Jesus is ‘Alpha and Omega.’”<sup>14</sup> For David Aune, this means that “John’s developing Christology is evident when the same divine names that he earlier ascribed to God are applied to Christ.”<sup>15</sup> What is particularly important, is that while Yeshua the Messiah might also be the Alef and the Tav or the Alpha and Omega—Yeshua does not possess these titles independently of God the Father, but instead because He is integrated into the Divine Identity. Ben Witherington III appropriately summarizes,

“The claim is being made that Christ shares in the eternal being of God, but not only so. Notice that in Isa. 44:6 it is Yahweh declaring, ‘I am the first and last, and besides me there is no god,’ making it all the more remarkable that Jesus uses this phrase to identify himself. He shares in the work of both creation and new creation that God brought about precisely because he shares in the divine being. It is not a surprise then that Christ is the proper object of worship in Revelation.”<sup>16</sup>

If Yeshua the Messiah independently said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 22:13), then obviously He would be an important figure in the cosmic schema. But the fact that God proper is first stated to be the Alef and the Tav or the Alpha and the Omega, necessarily requires further inquiry into the nature of Yeshua the Messiah.

## **Revelation 1:9-20**

### **“Yeshua the Messiah as the First and the Last”**

*“I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Yeshua, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Yeshua. I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, ‘Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.’ Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the*

<sup>14</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 71.

<sup>15</sup> Aune, 52a:59.

<sup>16</sup> Ben Witherington III, *New Cambridge Bible Commentary: Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003),

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things which will take place after these things. As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven [assemblies], and the seven lampstands are the seven [assemblies].”

Within John’s prophetic vision of the end, to be conveyed to the seven assemblies of Asia Minor (Revelation 1:9-11),<sup>17</sup> he encounters an important figure described as a “son of man” (*huion anthrōpou*, υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου). This figure in Heaven is for certain supernatural, and possesses significant power:

“I turned around to see who was speaking to me; and when I had turned, I saw seven gold *menorahs*; and among the *menorahs* was someone like a Son of Man, wearing a robe down to his feet and a gold band around his chest. His head and hair were as white as snow-white wool, his eyes like a fiery flame, his feet like burnished brass refined in a furnace, and his voice like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, out of his mouth went a sharp double-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength” (Revelation 1:12-16, CJB/CJSB).

John has encountered the Daniel 7:13-14 *bar enash* (בֶּר אֲנִישׁ) Son of Man, presented before the Ancient of Days, given an everlasting rule, and to whom all of Creation must worship. This figure is seen to be attired in a manner similar to Israel’s high priest (Exodus 28:4; 39:29), or various prophets (Zechariah 3:4). Yeshua, the Son of Man, is also described similar to God the Father, as seen in Daniel 7:9: “And the Ancient of Days took *His* seat; His vesture *was* like white snow and the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne *was* ablaze with flames, its wheels *were* a burning fire.” It would also be appropriate to recall the scene of the Transfiguration here: “And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light” (Matthew 17:2). In broad terms, examiners of Revelation will conclude that the exalted Yeshua in Revelation 1:12-16 is depicted in both priestly and regal garments, and in terms which directly appropriate the descriptions of God proper. M. Eugene Boring concludes that “God-language” is used of Yeshua in this scene:

“John chooses the language of Scripture to paint this picture of the risen Christ. The details are carefully chosen: The ‘long robe’ is the priestly garment, taken from Exodus 28:4, 24 (cf. Wis. Sol. 18:24), while the ‘golden girdle’ is the royal emblem of the king (I Macc. 10:89). As elsewhere, John is aware that the messianic office of Jesus includes the prophetic-revelatory, the priestly, and the kingly functions. The dazzling white hair is taken from the ‘one that was ancient of days’ in Daniel 7:9. John’s monotheism and theocentrism save him from the danger of identifying God and Jesus, or making them competitors, so he does not hesitate to use God-language of Jesus. The use of such language is an expression of his conviction that ‘God’ is to be defined as ‘the one who has revealed himself definitively in Jesus.’”<sup>18</sup>

It is to be noted that examiners have had to deliberate over whether or not Yeshua, as described by John here, is to be seen as an angel, something more than an angel, or is on some level to be considered God. Keener, who does hold to a high Christology of Yeshua being God, does recognize how there are angelic appellations which are given to Yeshua, but that it would be entirely inappropriate to view Yeshua as being an entity only slightly more important than an angel. For Keener, it is ultimately the association of Yeshua the Messiah as the Daniel 7:13-14

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<sup>17</sup> Consult the entry for Revelation 1:10 in the *Messianic Sabbath Helper* by Messianic Apologetics, for an analysis of *ἡ Κυριακὴ ἡμέρα* (τῆ κυριακῆ ἡμέρᾳ), commonly translated as “the Lord’s day.”

<sup>18</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Revelation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 83.

“Son of Man,” which requires one to conclude that Yeshua the Messiah and God the Father are closely intertwined:

“The angelic features in John’s vision of Jesus (eyes like fire and limbs like bronze in Dan. 10:6, though bronze limbs may also recall Ezek. 1:7) do not reduce Jesus to an angelic level, but probably simply suggest Jesus’ great glory; he cannot be portrayed as less glorious than a glorious angel. Eyes like fire describe passionate eyes in Greek literature, but they can also depict the supernaturally flaming eyes of divine beings or angels; glowing metal may also depict God’s glory in Ezekiel 1:27.

“Yet other features suggest that while John portrays Jesus’ glory as no less than that of an angel, it is certainly *more* than that of an angel. The voice like ‘the sound of rushing waters’ (1:15; cf. 19:6) may recall the voice like a multitude in Daniel 10:6, but especially recalls the sound of God’s own voice as many waters in Ezekiel 1:24; 43:2 (cf. 4 Ezra 6:17). Jesus’ title (‘someone “like a son of man,”’ Rev. 1:13) recalls the figure who would reign as God’s agent in Daniel 7:13-14; the hair like wool and comparison with white snow (1:14) allude to God himself, the ‘Ancient of Days’ in the same Daniel passage (Dan. 7:9-10).”<sup>19</sup>

John is overwhelmed by the presence of the figure he encounters, as though he were dead (Revelation 1:17a), reacting in a manner as others did when they encountered Divine glory (Isaiah 6:5; Ezekiel 1:28; Daniel 8:17; 10:9-11). Veneration of some sort may be implied in *epsa pros tous podas autou* (ἔπεσα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ), “I fell at the feet of him” (Brown and Comfort).<sup>20</sup> More significant to be considered, though, is how Yeshua, the Son of Man, makes a bold claim in what is recorded in the source text as, *egō eimi ho pōtos kai ho eschatos* (ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος), “I AM the first and the last” (Revelation 1:17b, PME). It is first to be recognized how Yeshua the Messiah is seen speaking the Exodus 3:14 burning bush “I am” formula (addressed previously in **Volume I**). The Greek *egō eimi* is seen throughout the Gospel of John, in places where significant claims are present regarding the nature, actions, and salvation of Yeshua. As Aune properly indicates,

“The *ego-eimi* formula occurs a total of forty-eight times in the NT, almost always attributed to Christ or to God and therefore of christological or theological interest...The ‘I am’ formula is particularly important for Johannine studies...The ‘I am’ formula in Revelation is uttered exclusively by God (1:8; 21:6) and Christ (1:17; 2:23; 22:16) and is used to make divine predications for the speaker.”<sup>21</sup>

Previously, it cannot go overlooked how God the Father is recorded in the source text of Revelation 1:8 as saying, *Egō eimi to alpha kai to ω* (Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ). With God proper employing the *egō eimi* or “I am” formula, Yeshua the Messiah further employing it only several verses later, should be of some weight to readers. However, it is not inappropriate that commentators such as Osborne do stress that the employment of *egō eimi* in the Book of Revelation, is not exactly the same as in the Gospel of John:

“Jesus is first described as ἐγὼ εἰμι (*egō eimi*, I am). It is difficult to know whether we should read the titular use of the ‘I am’ from John into Revelation. Since there are some nuances of Exod. 3:14 in Rev. 1:4, however, it is indeed viable to see those aspects here, though it is possibly as explicit as the predicated ‘I am’ sayings of John 6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1. Three of the four ἐγὼ εἰμι sayings of Revelation have clear parallels to John...[noting 1:8;

<sup>19</sup> Keener, *Revelation*, 95.

<sup>20</sup> Brown and Comfort, 853.

<sup>21</sup> Aune, 52a:100-101.

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1:17; 22:16; and likely 2:23)...There are no absolute (nonpredicated) sayings in Revelation, so the emphasis is not as strong as in the Gospel of John. Nevertheless, it is probably present.”<sup>22</sup>

While there are significant employments of the *egō eimi* or Exodus 3:14 “I am” formula in Revelation, there will be even more heavy statements appearing, which directly bear on the question of whether or not Yeshua the Messiah is God, or is a created being. Revelation 1:17b in total is such a statement, given how this Son of Man figure claims to be “the first and the last.” Within the Tanach, the first and the last is a status that only the God of Israel has:

“Who has performed and accomplished *it*, calling forth the generations from the beginning? ‘I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last [*ani YHWH rishon v’et-achronim*, אֲנִי יְהוָה רִשׁוֹן וְאֶת־אַחֲרֵינִים, אֲנִי]. I am He” (Isaiah 41:4).

“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last [*ani rishon v’ani achron*, אֲנִי רִשׁוֹן וְאֲנִי אַחֲרֹן], and there is no God besides Me” (Isaiah 44:6).

“Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last [*ani rishon af ani achron*, אֲנִי רִשׁוֹן אֶף אֲנִי אַחֲרֹן]. Surely My hand founded the earth, and My right hand spread out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand together” (Isaiah 48:12-13).

Of the three passages quoted above, Isaiah 44:6 is, understandably, the most critical. Isaiah 44:6 not only claims “I am the first and I am the last,” but also “And there is no god but Me” (NJPS), *u’mibbal’aday ein elohim* (וְיִמְבַלְעָדָי אֵין אֱלֹהִים). Yeshua the Messiah, in Revelation 1:17b, invokes not only the qualities of the One God of Israel for Himself—but this is the same One God of Israel who says “aside from Me there is no God” (Isaiah 44:6, ATS). It should hardly be a surprise why various evangelical Christian theologians have concluded that Yeshua the Messiah must be recognized in close proximity to this One God of Israel, integrated into the Divine Identity:

- Grant R. Osborne: “In the context of Rev. 1:17-18, [the] sovereignty [of Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12] is extended to Christ.”<sup>23</sup>
- G.R. Beasley-Murray: “**I am the first and the last, and the living one** is virtually an exposition of the title *Alpha and Omega* (attributed to God in 1:8), and combines Isaiah 44:6 with the divine name revealed at the bush, Exodus 3:14.”<sup>24</sup>
- Craig S. Keener: “Because it is precisely the same title that identifies deity in the same context (cf. Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12), Jesus thus opens his revelation to John by announcing his deity.”<sup>25</sup>
- Gordon D. Fee: “[These are] words of identification, which at once both echo what God had said of himself in verse 8 and then identify the speaker in terms that can refer only to the risen Christ. Thus Christ beings, **I am the First and the Last**, language used by Yahweh to identify himself in Isaiah 44:6 (cf. 48:12) and used by John to identify God in verse 8 above as ‘the Alpha and the Omega.’ It is now used by the living Christ as a means of self-identity, again, reflecting John’s especially high Christology.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, pp 94-95.

<sup>23</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 95.

<sup>24</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 67.

<sup>25</sup> Keener, *Revelation*, 97.

<sup>26</sup> Fee, *Revelation*, 19.

Yeshua further claims to be “the living One” (Revelation 1:18a) or “He who lives” (NKJV), *ho zōn* ὁ ζῶν; cf. John 1:4; 14:6). Further on in Revelation, God proper is described as He “who lives forever and ever” (Revelation 4:10; 10:6). In the estimation of Leon Morris, “we have another example of the use of identical qualities of the Father and the Son.”<sup>27</sup>

Yeshua was resurrected from the dead, and possesses dominion over death and the netherworld. He says, “I hold the keys of death and *Sheol*” (Revelation 1:18b, TLV). Not only does Yeshua have supremacy over these realms, but it also demonstrates the utter insufficiency of pagan figures like the goddess Hekate, who ruled in Hades.<sup>28</sup> **Yeshua is Lord of the living and the dead** (Romans 14:8-9). Yeshua holding the keys of death and the netherworld once again appropriates a role which the One God of Israel alone is depicted as having. The Jerusalem Targum on Deuteronomy 28:12 notably says,

“Four keys are in the hand of the Lord of all the world, which He hath not delivered into the hands of any secondary power: the key of life, and of the tombs, and of food, and of rain; and thus did Mosheh the prophet speak:— The Lord will open to you His good treasure which is with Him in the heavens, and will give you the rain of your land in its season; the early in Marchesvan, and the latter in Nisan; and will bless you in all the works of your hands; and you will lend to many peoples, but shall have no need to borrow.”<sup>29</sup>

Wisdom 16:13 in the Apocrypha further states, of the Lord God, “For you have power over life and death; you lead mortals down to the gates of Hades and back again” (NRSV). Yet, in Revelation 1:18b, Yeshua the Messiah says “I hold the keys of death and the underworld” (Goodspeed New Testament).

The Apostle John is simply told to write down the things he sees (Revelation 1:19). For those investigating the nature of Yeshua from the Book of Revelation, they are to continue to catalogue and review the statements and activities of the Messiah, as they see Him portrayed in close association with God the Father.

## **Revelation 2:8**

### **“Yeshua the Messiah as the First and the Last”**

**“And to the angel of the [assembly] in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this.”**

Yeshua’s message to the assembly at Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11) does have some controversy associated with it,<sup>30</sup> but it is Yeshua’s self-introduction which bears importance as to His nature and identity: “To the angel of Messiah’s community in Smyrna write: ‘Thus says the First and Last, who was dead and came to life’” (Revelation 2:8, TLV). Here, Yeshua is first given the titles *ho prōtos kai ho eschatos* (ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος). The title “first and last” is significant, given its self-designation of the God of Israel in Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12. Evangelical Christian examiners of Revelation, cataloguing statements and self-descriptions of Yeshua the Messiah, take Yeshua being “the first and the last” in Revelation 2:8 as a definite indicator of a high Christology:

- Grant R. Osborne: “This title is used only of Christ in the book (1:17; 2:8; 22:13) and in 1:17 is connected to God as the Alpha and Omega (1:8; 21:6; the two occur together in 22:13, where they depict Christ). Both titles mean that God and Christ

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<sup>27</sup> Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 55.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Boring, 84; Witherington, *Revelation*, 82.

<sup>29</sup> [BibleWorks 9.0: Targum Pseudo Jonathan on the Pentateuch](#). MS Windows 7 Release. Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC, 2011. DVD-ROM.

<sup>30</sup> The issue of the “synagogue of Satan” is addressed, in various parts of the author’s book *Israel in Future Prophecy*.